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SUBJECT: PAKISTAN ABOLISHES ITS NSC

REF: ISLAMABAD 3719

Classified By: Anne W. Patterson for reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary: On November 28, Prime Minister Gilani publicly announced that he and President Zardari had dissolved the National Security Council (NSC). The move was designed to stave off demands by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz that Zardari deliver on promises to cede presidential powers to the Prime Minister. The NSC was a much-criticized Musharraf-era institution that gave the President primacy in defense/foreign policy decisions and gave the military a formal stake in policy making. Zardari never convened the NSC and instead appointed a National Security Advisor to the Prime Minister as a counter to the President's NSC. However, Zardari has yet to fulfill his pledge to introduce legislation in the parliament to repeal the 17th amendment, particularly Article 58.2(b), which gives the President the power to dissolve the National Assembly. It appears that Zardari made the decision to abolish the NSC without consulting the military, a move that reportedly has exacerbated civilian-military tensions just as the Mumbai bombings exposed additional rifts between the two groups. End Summary.

¶2. (C) The NSC was created as a consultative body that was chaired by the President. President Musharraf created the council in 2001, and it was formalized by the National Security Act of 2004. The NSC consisted of 13 members, beside the President, it included the Prime Minister, the Chairman of the Senate, the Speaker of the National Assembly, the Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly, the Chief Ministers of all four provinces, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Committee, and the Chiefs of Staff of the Pakistan Army, Navy, and Air Force. The council was created as a forum for the president and the federal government on matters of national security including the sovereignty, integrity, defense, and security of the State and crisis management in general. Critics argued that the NSC consolidated too much power in the hands of a military president, since the majority of NSC members were in uniform. Similar councils have been promulgated during other periods of military rule in Pakistan, including that of General Zia ul-Haq.

¶3. (C) On November 28, Prime Minister Gilani announced in Islamabad that he and President Zardari had decided to disband the NSC. Gilani told reporters, "We don't accept Musharraf's NSC. The president and I have discussed the issue and the good news is that we have decided to dissolve it." The Prime Minister said that Nawaz Sharif had also rejected

the council. Gilani said that security issues would now be dealt with more effectively because former Ambassador Mahmud Ali Durrani had been appointed National Security Adviser to the Prime Minister. Gilani did not specify any mechanism or institution that would replace the NSC or facilitate civilian-military coordination. Most Pakistani editorials have praised the move as "doing away with a body that represented autocratic power."

4.(C) Comment: The dissolution of the NSC by Prime Minister Gilani and President Zardari is being touted as a step towards stronger democratic institutions and the removal of the military's influence in governance. The NSC, which has not once convened under the Pakistan People's Party government, was largely a defunct organization. However, its formal dissolution helps appease Nawaz Sharif and other opposition leaders who claim that President Zardari is keeping much of Musharraf's autocratic powers for himself. This move falls short of the opposition's ultimate demand: the repeal of Article 58.2(b), which gives the President the power to dismiss the National Assembly. While the NSC was not actively used by the current government, its dissolution removes the last formal institution where civilian politicians could directly interact with Pakistan's military leaders. It appears that the military was not consulted in advance of this decision, which is proof in itself of the need for such a coordinating mechanism.
PATTERSON